

## CONVERSAZIONE OF THE ARCHITECTURAL ASSOCIATION.

The opening meeting and conversations of this association was held on October 1st, at Lyon's-fair-hall, and was exceedingly well attended. Letters of apology from the Earl de Grey, Professor Cockerell, Mr. Inman, and others were announced. A report from the committee was read, which congratulated the members on the satisfactory condition of the association, adverted to the great progress made during the past session, and ascribed the prosperity of the society to the free and unrestricted but kindly criticism it was its object to foster. Allusion was also made in it to the success of the Architectural Exhibition, which had in the first instance been originated by the independent exertions of the association.

Mr. Kerr, in moving the adoption of the report, took occasion to allude to several questions which had been with more or less success taken in hand by the association, namely, architectural education, the architectural exhibition, and the *questio verata* of competitions. With regard to the first, he alluded to the progress which was gradually being made towards the obtaining by the profession of that which is the object of its existence—the proper and scientific management of the entire building operations of the country. But a few years ago there were almost no architects as a separate profession,—even Nash was a builder; now their number was very considerable, and it was rapidly increasing. Some deplored this as ruinous; but he contended that it was properly the mere result of the increased division of labour and the increased appreciation of the architect's use—demand creating supply. However, it was a serious fact at the same time that the public had but little confidence in the architectural profession: this was the reason of the condition in competitions that the committee would not bind themselves to employ the successful competitor, and so on: if the architectural profession possessed the confidence of the public as others do, such a condition would be out of the question: it was also displayed in the fact of the royal mansion at Osborne having been built without an architect. (It was here remarked, however, that this was not to be the case with the new palace at Balmoral.) Although it was to be expected that a rapid increase in the demand for architects would weaken the supply for a time, yet, he contended, there was more than this in it. The means of education were essentially defective and inadequate. Royal Academy lectures, six a year, were not sufficient. University lectures also, wherein a single professor had to take the whole province of art and science, as if it were but a very small one, were not sufficient. The Institute of architects ought to have its professors and teachers, so that every one of the numerous subjects of study should be taught by a man who had given peculiar attention to that one department, and was perfect in it. The profession would never acquire the complete confidence of the public of this matter of fact and common sense country till such means of thorough instruction were provided. The institute, he thought, had too much on its hands to enter fully upon such an undertaking yet; and whether the association could contrive to provide any substitute in the meantime was a question worthy of consideration. With regard to the architectural exhibition, he congratulated the association upon the success which had attended their efforts in its establishment. In the time of Sir Joshua Reynolds, when painting and sculpture were mere reproductions of antique conventionalities, architecture being the same, was a fit member of the same academy; but now that both the one and the other had become more truly principled, the disparity of nature between pictorial art and constructive art was made apparent. Thus arose the disrespect shown towards architecture in the rooms of the Academy both by the public and by the academicians themselves. At the same time the increase of architectural employment provided more and more the means of supplying an exhibition of its own. The association had the

great merit of setting this on foot; it had succeeded beyond expectation; and now that the management had been without hesitation transferred to the subscribers, the public would additionally appreciate the magnanimity of the act. As regarded architectural competitions, he was sorry that the efforts of the association had not produced much of a practical result. The principle of the competition was, no doubt, as ancient as the art of architectural drawing; and this species of business might be said to stand almost alone as to the applicability of the principle. The undoubted fixedness of its establishment at the present day was the result, not of accident, but of sound and philosophic principle. Many persons had contended against the system altogether, but it was in vain to do so: we must rather suit ourselves to the fact of its fixedness. There were many most obnoxious details in the present operation of the system, and the good of it was almost entirely lost; but it only required a remedy to correct all or most of the evil. The want of confidence in the architectural profession and its cause, he had already alluded to; but its result here was more serious still. Suspicion being once justified, this provoked licence; and all the injustices of everyday experience were the consequence. What he considered to be needed was confederation—the trades' union system in some form. The public were not unwilling to give fair play, if this were understood. The diversity of opinion among architects themselves was a difficulty, and there might be some who would adopt the policy of keeping aloof for selfish ends; but these difficulties were not insurmountable. A well-founded confederation upon the abstract question might soon determine details of operation; and he recommended such to be formed, although after all nothing could enable the profession to dispense with the merit which he had first alluded to,—that thorough education which would secure universal confidence.

Mr. Edmeston, who was in the chair, then read an address, from which we make the following extracts:—

"The schools of design established all over Europe, the art societies, the artisan schools, and numbers of similar institutions, all point plainly towards the direction public taste is taking, and are all called into action by it; and if one proof could be found stronger than another, it is to see at this moment the hard, calculating spirit of trade deliberately counting the cost and relying on the profit to be reaped by an expenditure of large treasure, in furnishing forth a resort of public amusement with food for the mind and not merely for the eye and ear, in sending forth two gentlemen of known ability to select and purchase at great cost works of art the best and most rare, efforts of the highest taste and genius, and that to please and entertain a holiday multitude.

A better comprehension and criticism of works of art is becoming more widely diffused each day: the eye of the beholder becomes more alive to the beauties that may be placed before it, and learns to discriminate between the fictitious, the claptrap, the merely mechanical, as opposed to the true and the poetic."

"Time was when, from the highest branches of poetical design down to the lowest connection between design and production of all kinds, there was but little encouragement afforded by the public at all: in manufactures the direct application of art was not understood, and there was a general absence of enlightenment and perception upon all matters of decorative art in all forms. Professor Cockerell himself complained very justly before the select committee of the House of Commons,—that 'while the improvements in the science of building gave us great advantages over our forefathers, architecture as an art had lost ground,' and its principles were less understood than formerly. At that time it was no fashionable subject of research, it was matter of caprice as to what style of any age or country could be called the best (the prevailing taste was, indeed, Elizabethan), a state of things to be truly laid to the ignorance of the mass in matters of taste. But it was time that matters should mend. Manufacturers found there was a necessity to adopt different views: art manufacturers and applications were called into existence: an Art Journal found a widely-extended support: books were written, lectures given, papers read before societies; the least and the worst of all an indicative as the best of an earnest desire, an awakened spirit; calling into action all sorts of argument,—

warm discussions—almost hostile demonstrations; so that opinions hostile to all before mentioned, became a crowd to meet, and the easy path of professional life became filled with stumbling stones, with gaps and holes, hidden and unseen before, till the weary mind was well nigh tempted to put the whole down as empty trash, and to listen no longer."

"The industrial arts are now leading the way, and each day the public mind will become more alive to and will learn to relish the higher and more ideal creations of fancy: inasmuch the public eye will become educated. The demand will be made, and our business it is to be prepared to satisfy it, and to see that the noble art of architecture is not alone behindhand. There is, indeed, much to do. In all this great city of London how little is there which attempts or professes in the least degree to take any part whatever in the general progress."

"The architectural student labours under many difficulties. No mere drawing school or school of design will do for him: it would be quite insufficient, because his pursuit is mixed up with the technical knowledge of numerous handicrafts, of which he could not possibly gain any experience in a school."

Mr. Tite expressed the great gratification he felt in being present for the first time at a meeting of a society so numerous and so successful in its object. Looking around him, and reverting to the experience of his own youth, he could only say, notwithstanding all the defectiveness of the means of education at present, that if students nowadays could only understand how much inferior were the means at command at that time they would feel thankful for what opportunities they possessed. He remembered how, more than thirty years ago, he was a member of such a society as the present, formed by half a dozen students of the academy, and how it had to be abandoned after only a few months' existence from total want of encouragement. But even although matters were mended now, he could not help saying how far our brethren on the continent were before us. In Germany, where he had recently spent some time, he found that the profession possessed, more particularly in Berlin, its regular teachers of every branch of the architect's knowledge. The student had classes at his command on every subject in detail. After a thorough instruction of this nature, he had to devote a fixed period to practical work: he was then ready to submit his acquirements to the examination of persons appointed by Government: it was only after such examination that he commenced as an architect; and he who had not the license of the examiners was not allowed to practise at all. The consequence was, that the German architects were thoroughly possessed of the whole extent of professional skill. For instance, he had looked over the new Museum at Berlin, which every one knew to be an extensive and elaborate work of art: he had afterwards had the gratification of seeing the working drawings of the building, and it was only then that he perceived to his astonishment how complete and intricate had been the architect's labours. He found that they had embraced the most minute details of decoration from first to last. Nothing had been left to other management: the colouring was all completely arranged on the drawings,—even the gilding on the enrichments; the panels for paintings were matters for determination by the architect, Herr Stüler; and even the subjects of the pictures, the work of Cornelius and other masters, were chosen by him as part of his design. The consequence was, that the entire work was one harmonious whole,—absolute unity of purpose pervaded every part of it,—it was the production of a single mind.

At a future period of the evening, Mr. Tite adverted to a remark which had been casually dropped, which appeared to be in opposition to the principle of an architect's payment by commission. He hoped it would not be allowed to go forth that any departure from the recognised system would be encouraged for a moment. Of all competition, that of price would be the worst. Every architect ought to stand far above the possibility of a suspicion that he would increase his client's expenditure for the increase of his own commission. This principle of payment was recognised every-